



HISTORICAL SECURITY COUNCIL

Topic 1: The Suez Crisis (1956): The Rise of Diplomacy and the
Recession of Colonial Power

Chairs: Thor Pearson and Emma Scapecchi

Committee overview

In the Historical Security Council, delegates relive, influence, and possibly alter the outcome of significant historical events. In this way, delegates will represent countries that existed decades ago. While HSC is a fictional committee, it largely follows the framework of the Security Council, but with adjustments for the time period relevant to the topic. Like the Security Council, the HSC will have five permanent member states (the USA, the Republic of China, France, the UK, and Russia) with veto power.

The Historical Security Council allows delegates to examine how major international decisions were shaped by power, diplomacy, and national interests in the past. With a similar framework to the Security Council, the HSC highlights key features of global governance like great power influence, the veto system, and collective security and diplomacy.

Background on the topic

This committee is examining the international crisis caused by the nationalisation of the Suez Canal on the 26th of July, 1956, by Gamel Abdel Nasser, President of Egypt, who announced the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company, the joint British-French enterprise which has owned and operated the Suez Canal since its construction in 1869. The Canal serves as a vital strategic and economic waterway, essential to global trade and transportation of oil to Europe. In response, the United Kingdom, France, and Israel coordinated a military intervention aimed at regaining control of the canal and undermining Nasser's authority. This issue raises key questions about state sovereignty, the legitimacy of military intervention and the balance between national interests and international law.

Several significant events are central to understanding this topic. Following the withdrawal of American and British funding for the Aswan High Dam and the Canal's nationalisation, Israel invaded the Sinai Peninsula, providing Britain and France with a pretext to intervene militarily. However, diplomatic pressures from both the United States and the Soviet Union forced the invading powers to halt their operations and withdraw.

Currently, international opinion is deeply divided. Britain and France argue that their actions are necessary to safeguard international shipping and regional stability, while many other states perceive the intervention as an attempt to preserve colonial power. The United States has opposed the use of force, fearing escalation during the Cold War and instability in the Middle East, while the Soviet Union has seen this crisis as an opportunity to expand its influence among post colonial states. Newly independent states have expressed support for Egypt, viewing the crisis as a defining moment for national sovereignty and self-determination.

Key terms and definitions

Suez Canal: Sea-level waterway running north-south across the Isthmus of Suez in Egypt, connecting the Mediterranean and Red Sea.

Nationalisation: The transfer of a major branch of industry or commerce from private to state ownership or control.

Colonialism: The policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically.

Sovereignty: The authority of a state to govern itself or another state.

Cold War: Ongoing political rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies that developed after World War II.

Relevant UN bodies and resolutions

UN Bodies

- **United Nations Security Council** - The United Nations Security Council was the first body to address the Suez Crisis, as it holds primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. Following Israel's invasion of Egypt, the Council debated resolutions calling for a ceasefire and withdrawal of forces. However, the United Kingdom and France vetoed resolutions condemning their actions, creating a deadlock. This highlighted the limits of the veto system when permanent members are directly involved in a conflict.
- **United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)** - When the Security Council was blocked, the issue was transferred to the General Assembly under the "Uniting for Peace" mechanism. The Assembly called for an immediate ceasefire and respect for Egyptian sovereignty through emergency resolutions. Although its decisions are not legally binding, the strong majority vote gave political legitimacy to international pressure on Britain, France, and Israel. This marked a significant expansion of the Assembly's practical influence.
- **United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF)** - The United Nations Emergency Force was created in November 1956 to supervise the ceasefire and oversee the withdrawal of foreign troops. It became the first large-scale UN peacekeeping mission and operated with Egypt's consent. UNEF acted as a neutral buffer between Egyptian and Israeli forces to prevent renewed fighting. Its creation established key principles that shaped future UN peacekeeping operations.

Conventions/Treaties

- **Convention of Constantinople (1888)** - The Convention of Constantinople established that the Suez Canal would remain open to ships of all nations in times of peace and war. Although Egypt retained sovereignty, the treaty guaranteed free navigation and restricted interference with canal operations. During the Suez Crisis, Britain and France argued that nationalisation threatened the canal's international status. Egypt maintained that ownership did not violate the treaty as long as navigation remained open to all states.
- **United Nations Charter (1945)** - The UN Charter formed the legal foundation of debates during the crisis. Article 2(4) prohibits the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, raising questions about the legality of the

UK–France–Israel intervention. Article 51 allows for self-defense, which Israel cited in justifying its invasion of Sinai.

Major actors and their relevance

Countries

- **Egypt** - Egypt is at the center of the crisis after President Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal in July 1956. Nasser framed the move as an assertion of sovereignty and a rejection of colonial influence, particularly after Western powers withdrew funding for the Aswan High Dam. Egypt argues that nationalisation did not violate international law as long as freedom of navigation was maintained.
- **Israel** - Israel invaded the Sinai Peninsula on 29 October 1956, citing self-defense and security concerns. Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion aimed to end Egyptian support for fedayeen raids and to reopen the Straits of Tiran, which Egypt had blocked to Israeli shipping. Israel also sought to weaken Egypt militarily and alter the regional balance of power. Although initially successful on the battlefield, Israel withdrew under international pressure and the deployment of UN peacekeepers.
- **United Kingdom** - The United Kingdom, led by Prime Minister Anthony Eden, viewed the nationalisation of the canal as a strategic and economic threat. Britain relied heavily on the canal for oil supplies and feared the expansion of Nasser's influence in the Middle East. In coordination with France and Israel, Britain launched military operations to regain control of the canal zone. However, intense diplomatic and financial pressure from the United States forced Britain to withdraw, marking a significant decline in its global imperial power.
- **United States** - The United States opposed the Anglo-French-Israeli intervention despite its alliances with Britain and France. President Dwight D. Eisenhower feared that the invasion would destabilise the Middle East and push Arab states toward the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The US used economic pressure, including threats affecting the British currency, to compel withdrawal.

Organisations

- **International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)** - As the primary international actor, the ICRC sent delegates to Egypt to survey the application of the Geneva Conventions, facilitate the exchange of prisoners of war between Egypt and Israel, and coordinate aid efforts.
- **League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies** - This organization coordinated international donations and aid from various national societies worldwide, particularly for the Egyptian Red Crescent.
- **Egyptian Red Crescent Society** - Central to the local relief efforts, they handled the distribution of supplies in Port Said, including food, blankets, and aid for those who lost their homes.
- **National Red Cross Societies** - Numerous international branches of the Red Cross, such as the Indonesian Red Cross and German Red Cross, sent money, goods, and medical supplies to

the Egyptian Red Crescent.

- **Catholic Relief Services (CRS)** - At the invitation of President Gamal Abdel Nasser, CRS provided relief assistance in Egypt to people affected by the Suez War in 1956.
- **British Petroleum (BP) and Shell** - Major British-connected oil companies heavily impacted by the crisis, as the potential closure of the canal threatened oil shipments from the Persian Gulf to Western Europe.

Guiding questions

- 1. How should the United Nations Security Council respond immediately to the invasion of Egyptian territory? Should it prioritise ceasefire, withdrawal, or enforcement measures?
- 2. Does the nationalisation of the Suez Canal constitute a legal exercise of Egyptian sovereignty, or does it threaten international peace and security?
- 3. Can Israel legitimately invoke self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter to justify its military actions in Sinai?
- 4. Are the actions of the United Kingdom and France a lawful intervention to protect international navigation, or an act of aggression?
- 5. Should the Council consider establishing an international force to supervise a ceasefire and ensure the withdrawal of foreign troops?
- 6. How can escalation between the United States and the Soviet Union be prevented while addressing the crisis effectively?
- 7. Should the Suez Canal be placed under temporary international administration to guarantee freedom of navigation?
- 8. What measures can ensure long-term regional stability in the Middle East following the current hostilities?
- 9. If permanent members of the Security Council are directly involved in the conflict, how should the Council maintain legitimacy and impartiality?
- 10. What immediate steps are necessary to prevent further civilian casualties and humanitarian consequences in Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula?

Works cited

- Britannica. "Suez Canal | History, Map, Importance, & Facts." Encyclopedia Britannica, 26 Mar. 2021, www.britannica.com/topic/Suez-Canal.
- Habibi, Mariam. *History of Europe and the Middle East: Course Companion*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Office of the Historian. "The Suez Crisis, 1956." State.gov, 2019, history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/suez.
- "OLMUN» Committees» HSC." Olmun.org, 2025, www.olmun.org/Committees/HSC/. Accessed 23 Jan. 2026.

Oxford. "Colonialism, N. Meanings, Etymology and More | Oxford English Dictionary." Wwww.oed.com, 2026, www.oed.com/dictionary/colonialism_n?tab=factsheet#8917586.

———. "Nationalism, N. Meanings, Etymology and More | Oxford English Dictionary." Wwww.oed.com, 2026, www.oed.com/dictionary/nationalism_n?tab=factsheet#35385575.

———. "Sovereignty, N. Meanings, Etymology and More | Oxford English Dictionary." Oed.com, 2023, www.oed.com/dictionary/sovereignty_n?tab=factsheet#21523222.

The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica. "Cold War | Causes, Facts, & Summary." Encyclopedia Britannica, 19 Jan. 2024, www.britannica.com/event/Cold-War.